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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to investigate in a controlled multivariate fashion the effects of participation and involvement in extracurricular activities on adolescent self-esteem and to analyze for possible sex differences in these relationships. Middle-class high school students (N=445) completed measures of self-esteem, degree of participation in extracurricular activities, involvement in extracurricular activities, cumulative grade point average, and number of hours students spent working at a job outside of school each week. The results indicated no significant predictors of self-esteem among males. Among females, the significant predictors of self-esteem were the number of hours of work, age, and curricular track (college preparatory, general, business, vocational-technical). Being older, working fewer hours, and being in the business or vocational versus the general or college preparatory curricular track were associated with higher levels of self-esteem for females. Sex differences in the predictor variables were significant. Neither participation nor involvement in extracurricular activities were significantly associated with adolescent self-esteem. (NB)

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EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND ADOLESCENT SELF-ESTEEM: A MULTIVARIATE STUDY

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans. Address all correspondence to Jean A. Steitz, Ph.D., Foundations of Education, Memphis State University, Memphis, TN. 38152.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate within a multivariate context the effects of participation and involvement in extracurricular activities on adolescent self-esteem. The sample consisted of 445 middle-class high school students from Memphis, TN. The results indicated no significant predictors of self-esteem among the boys. Among the girls, the significant predictors of self-esteem were the number of hours of work, age, and curricular track. Sex differences in the predictor variables were significant. Neither participation nor involvement in extracurricular activities were significantly associated with adolescent self-esteem. The sex differences and the differential effects of working outside of school are discussed.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND ADOLESCENT SELF-ESTEEM: A MULTIVARIATE STUDY

Almost every student in American public education has experienced co-curricular or extracurricular activities as either a spectator or participant. Initial research on school extracurricular activities concentrated on participation in extracurricular activities, generally athletics, as the main outcome variable and sociological status variables (SES, curricular track, sex) as the main independent variables. More recent studies have begun to include psychological variables as predictors of participation. Indeed, Hanks (1979), Yarworth and Gauthier (1978), and Wegner (1980) have stressed the particular importance of self-esteem as both an antecedent and consequence of participation in extracurricular activities, especially for boys.

The purpose of this study was to investigate in a controlled multivariate fashion, the effects of participation and involvement in extracurricular activities on adolescent self-esteem and to analyze for possible sex differences in these relationships. Self-esteem was viewed as the outcome variable. The degree of participation in extracurricular activities (number of activities) and the involvement in extracurricular activities (average degree of importance attached to the activities in which the adolescents participate) were considered as the primary independent factors. Grade-point average (GPA), curricular track (college preparatory, general, business, vocational-technical),

age, and degree of outside work (number of work hours per week) were controlled via multiple regression. The study was exploratory as to the specific predictors of self-esteem and the extent of possible sex differences. However, it was hypothesized that participation and involvement in extracurricular activities would relate to adolescent self-esteem.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of 445 sophomore and junior high school students (210 boys, 235 girls) from a large high school in Memphis, Tennessee. The school is in an urban environment and draws from a predominantly white (90%) middle-class population.

Measures

Self-esteem was assessed using the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale. The degree of participation in extracurricular activities was assessed using the Student Activities Checklist adapted from Yarworth and Gauthier(1976). Involvement in extracurricular activities was operationalized in terms of the average degree of importance (rated on a 5-point Likert scale) attached to the activities in which the adolescents participate. Cummulative grade-point average was assessed on a 100-point scale. Work was assessed in terms of the number of hours per week spent working at a job outside of school.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed within the context of multiple regression. The regressions were done separately for each sex

and compared for possible sex differences.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 gives the means and standard deviations for each of the variables by sex. Table 1 indicates significant sex differences on each of the variables. The boys are somewhat

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Insert Table 1 about here

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older than the girls [$t(406) = 3.18$, $p = .002$], have a higher self-esteem [$t(419) = 3.63$, $p < .001$], and as a group work more hours [$t(393) = 2.58$, $p = .01$]. The girls have a higher grade point average (GPA) [$t(414) = -5.14$, $p < .001$], participate in more extracurricular activities [$t(428) = -7.36$, $p < .001$], and as a group are more involved in extracurricular activities [$t(394) = -2.82$, $p = .005$]. However, considering only those students who participate in extracurricular activities, it is the boys ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.13$) who are significantly more involved with their extracurricular activities, not the girls ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.01$) [$t(259) = 2.21$, $p = .03$]. The group sex differences only reflect the fact that more girls participate in extracurricular activities.

A comparison of the zero-order correlations and the standardized beta coefficients are given in Table 2. The results

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Insert Table 2 about here

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indicated no significant predictors of self-esteem among the boys. This conflicts with findings by Phillips (1969) in which participation in a student activity program was significantly related to self-concept for boys, but not for girls. For the girls, the regression was significant [$F(6,193) = 2.68$, $p = .02$], but accounted for little of the total variance ($R2 = .08$). This is consistent with the observation by Brennan (1985) that self-esteem for females is a complex variable dependent on a wide range of other variables. The significant predictors of self-esteem for the girls included the number of hours of work, age, and curricular track. Working fewer hours, being older, and being in the business or vocational versus the general or college preparatory curricular track was associated with higher levels of self-esteem for the females. The results also indicated that these sex differences in the regressions were significant [$F(7,364) = 3.16$, $p = .003$]. In turn, each of the significant predictors of self-esteem among the girls deserves some comment.

First, the more hours a girl works, the lower her self-esteem. Since this study is correlational, the directionality of this finding is unclear. Does working lead to lower self-esteem or are girls who have lower self-esteem more likely to work? In general, it would seem odd that working would lead to a lower self-esteem among girls, but not among boys. Especially when males traditionally have defined themselves by the work role more than have females. It seems more plausible that girls with lower self-esteem would be more attracted to an additional activity

such as work in order to affirm or raise their self-esteem.

Second, the older the female, the higher the self-esteem. This is consistent with other studies of women which indicate that self-esteem increases steadily across the life course (e.g., Lowenthal, Thurnher, & Chiriboga, 1975).

Third, the females who are in the business or vocational curricular track, as compared with the general or college preparatory track, had higher self-esteem. Perhaps these females who have decided on a business or vocational career have a clearer sense of what they are about, and thus a sense of accomplishment, that the college preparatory and general curricular track females do not yet have. Since curricular track is often associated with socioeconomic class and since lower socioeconomic classes place less restrictions and achievement demands upon adolescents as compared to the middle and upper classes this finding may reflect the greater pressure for success and achievement on those in the college preparatory track (see Santrock, 1987).

Although the relationship between participation in extracurricular activities and self-esteem was significantly different from zero for the females, its independent effect did not quite reach significance when the other factors were controlled. For the males, participation in extracurricular activities was unrelated to self-esteem. This was not as hypothesized and is contrary to a number of previous studies (e.g., Hanks, 1979; Leonardson, 1986; Rehberg, 1969). However,

previous studies have not controlled for the effects of working. Indeed, future research needs to further investigate the relationship between working outside of school, adolescent self-esteem, participation in extracurricular activities, and sex differences in these relationships.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations by Sex

Variables	Boys	Girls
Age	16.22 (.86)	15.96 (.77)
Grade Point Average	80.47 (7.79)	84.06 (6.75)
Esteem	31.64 (4.30)	30.19 (4.02)
Activities	1.58 (1.84)	3.09 (2.43)
Involvement	2.32 (1.98)	2.81 (1.58)
Hours Work	7.46 (11.04)	4.89 (9.41)

Table 2

Zero-Order Correlation and Standardized Betas for Self-Esteem

	Girls		Boys	
Variables	r	b	r	b
Age	.103	.164*	.062	.081
Curricular Track	-.107	-.148*	.002	.019
Work	-.135*	-.188***	-.006	-.031
Grade Point Average	.045	.089	.079	.087
Activities	.130*	.136	.100	.056
Involvement	.017	-.080	.103	.060

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001